

One More Reason to Fear the Beach

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Mermaids: The Body Found The film, on Animal Planet, will be shown on Sunday night at 9, Eastern and Pacific times; 8, Central time. [Animal Planet](#)

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As if we didn't have enough probably fictitious but possibly real beings to worry about. All over basic cable, people are searching for Bigfoot, hunting down ghosts, looking for extraterrestrials. Now, it turns out, we need to add mermaids to the list.

At least we do if you take "Mermaids: The Body Found" seriously. Which you shouldn't. The [film](#), Sunday night on Animal Planet and part of its Monster Week, is a fictional account built on a few strands of fact and made to look like an actual documentary. If you know those ground rules, it's a rather enjoyable and intriguing piece of work, in the same vein as "The Blair Witch Project."

The film, created and written by Charlie Foley, begins with the real, actual fact that the Navy's use of sonar systems is [suspected](#) by some scientists of contributing to whale beachings. And it takes note of an odd underwater sound known as [the Bloop](#) that was recorded in the Pacific Ocean in 1997.

From there "Mermaids" gives us two supposed scientists who are going rogue and telling all about a secret government investigation that has more or less proved the existence of mermaids. It turns out that whales haven't been the only creatures beaching themselves; two boys in Washington State caught [something else](#) on a cellphone camera before the authorities swooped in and pressured them into silence. Also, remains found inside a shark in South Africa were decidedly mermaidlike.



An animated scene from "Mermaids: The Body Found." [Animal Planet](#)

An expert uses those remains to reconstruct a mermaid, which, sadly, is not nearly as cute as Ariel from the Disney film and doesn't have her flowing red hair. But the public never got to meet this model mermaid because the whole project was black-opped.

"The feeling was like something out of Orwell," Paul, one of the whistle-blowing scientists, says earnestly. "This was Big Brother. They were rewriting history. Basically writing this creature out of existence."

Mr. Foley finds assorted ways to lend plausibility to the tale, like expanding the [aquatic ape theory](#), which postulates that human evolution was influenced by a shore-dwelling phase; in this film's version, one branch of our ancestors actually took the plunge, as it were, and began living in the sea. And, of course, the mermaids-are-real hypothesis is also given credence by the sheer abundance of the danged things in cultural references over the centuries.

"The seafaring Greeks described them," the film's narration says, "as did the Vikings, as did the Chinese during their greatest period of maritime exploration. They are recorded in medieval manuscripts, and even into the 19th century."

So keep a wary eye out at the beach this summer. Because they're out there, and all that sonar testing over the years has probably made them pretty cranky.

Mermaids: The Body Found

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